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ABSTRACT

For as long as anyone can remember the Puyallup Indians have been fishing the Puyallup River. It is the time of the yearly salmon run and Seeyap, a young Puyallup boy, is learning to fish with his grandfather. Salmon will only come up river when the tide goes out, so it is very early in the morning that Seeyap and his grandfather start out in the motor boat, string the long net across the river, and drift with the current. They catch nothing; it is much harder to fish now with all the industry along the river. A thunderstorm approaches, and when it is over, salmon are jumping and starting the trip up stream. The grandfather explains that the storm has cooled the water and told the fish it is time to go home. Now they catch many salmon. Some they will sell, some they will keep for themselves, and the very first one they will save for the traditional celebration dinner. Seeyap is sure that someday he will be a fisherman on the Puyallup. This intermediate level, illustrated book is intended for use in a social studies curriculum. It seeks to remind children that Indians exist in today's society and to acquaint them with aspects of the Puyallup culture, including characteristics of drift fishing and that it is done for reasons of subsistence and income. Children also learn of the salmon's migration, the factors affecting it, and how industry is imperiling it. An accompanying teacher's manual provides learning activities and background information. (DS)

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Fisherman on the Puyallup

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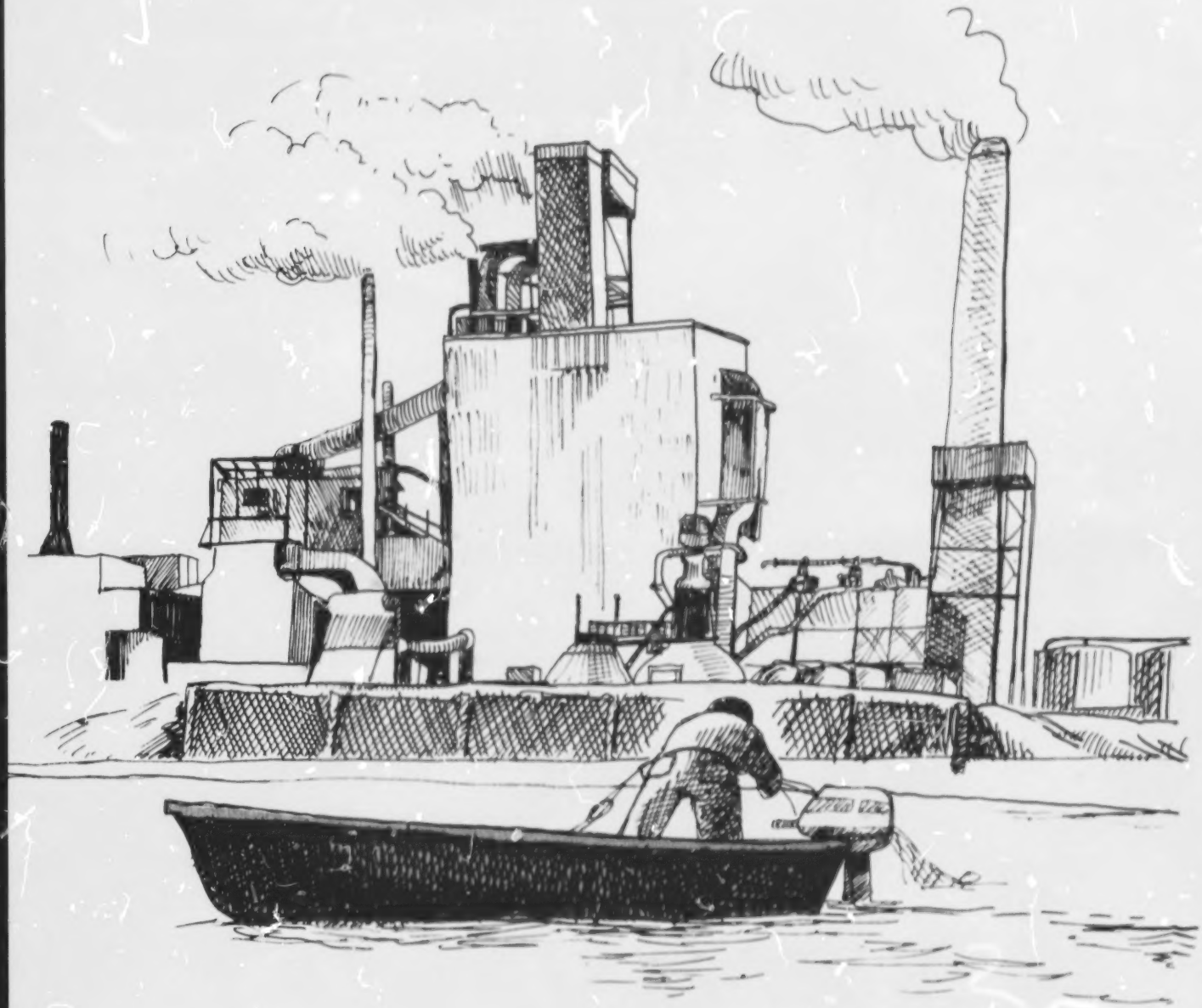
Seeyap is a young Puyallup Indian boy. In the Puyallup language, Seeyap is a name used for someone very special. Only Grandfather calls Seeyap by this name. Seeyap's other name is Roger Johnson.

Seeyap's grandfather is a fisherman on the Puyallup River. Grandfather fishes the part of the river where it empties into Commencement Bay in the city of Tacoma.

For as long as anyone can remember, Puyallup Indians have been fishing the Puyallup River. They fished the river long before the white man came and built the city of Tacoma on the banks of the river.

Tacoma was still a small town when Grandfather was a boy and was learning to fish. Grandfather learned to fish from *his* grandfather. *His* grandfather learned to fish from *his* grandfather. Now, Grandfather would teach Seeyap to fish.



Grandfather had taught Seeyap's older brother Mark to fish when he was Seeyap's age. Now, Mark was thirteen years old and had his own boat. Many young Puyallup boys had their own boats and fished the river on the weekend and after school.

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It was night when Seeyap went with Grandfather to the river. Although Grandfather's house was not very far away, Grandfather always stayed in his trailer on the river when he fished. Many Puyallup fishermen were staying on the river. Some were in trailers, others in tents.

Grandfather laid a sleeping bag down on the top bunk of his trailer for Seeyap. Grandfather tucked Seeyap into bed.

"Try to go right to sleep," Grandfather said. "We have to get up very early in the morning."

That night Seeyap did not sleep very well. There were many strange noises. The pulp mill across the river kept letting out blasts of steam. The ships in the bay blew their lonely fog horns.

Before it was even light, Grandfather woke Seeyap. Seeyap pulled on his clothes in a hurry. He put on the new yellow raincoat that his mother and father had bought him to go fishing with his grandfather. Seeyap followed Grandfather outside.

It was just becoming light. Other fishermen in the trailers and tents around them were up. Many voices sounded in the morning air.

Seeyap looked out at the river. There were many big waves. The fishing boats tied to the shore bounced up and down on the waves. In each of the boats, piles of fishing nets covered the bottom. Overhead were many dark clouds.

Grandfather handed Seeyap the paddle to their boat. "You can carry this," he said. "I'll take the tools for the motor."

Grandfather helped Seeyap into the boat. Then, he pushed the boat out onto the water. At the last moment, he jumped on.

Grandfather started the motor and headed the boat over to the other side of the river. When they went over big waves, Grandfather slowed the motor down.

Seeyap looked down the river to Commencement Bay. A big ship was anchored out in the bay.

"We catch the salmon on their way up river," Grandfather said. "Right now, the tide in the bay is going out. The salmon only head up river when the tide has stopped or when it is going out. They only head up river when they can feel the force of the river against them.

"Once the salmon start up river, they never turn back. They go until they reach the place where they were born. Then, they give birth to new salmon and die."

Grandfather and Seeyap waited until the boat ahead of them was almost to the end of the river. The boats went down the river one at a time.

Now, it was their turn. Grandfather began laying the net on the water. The net was very long. At last, Grandfather came to the end, letting go of it. The net floated free, curving across the river. Its orange floats bobbed up and down.

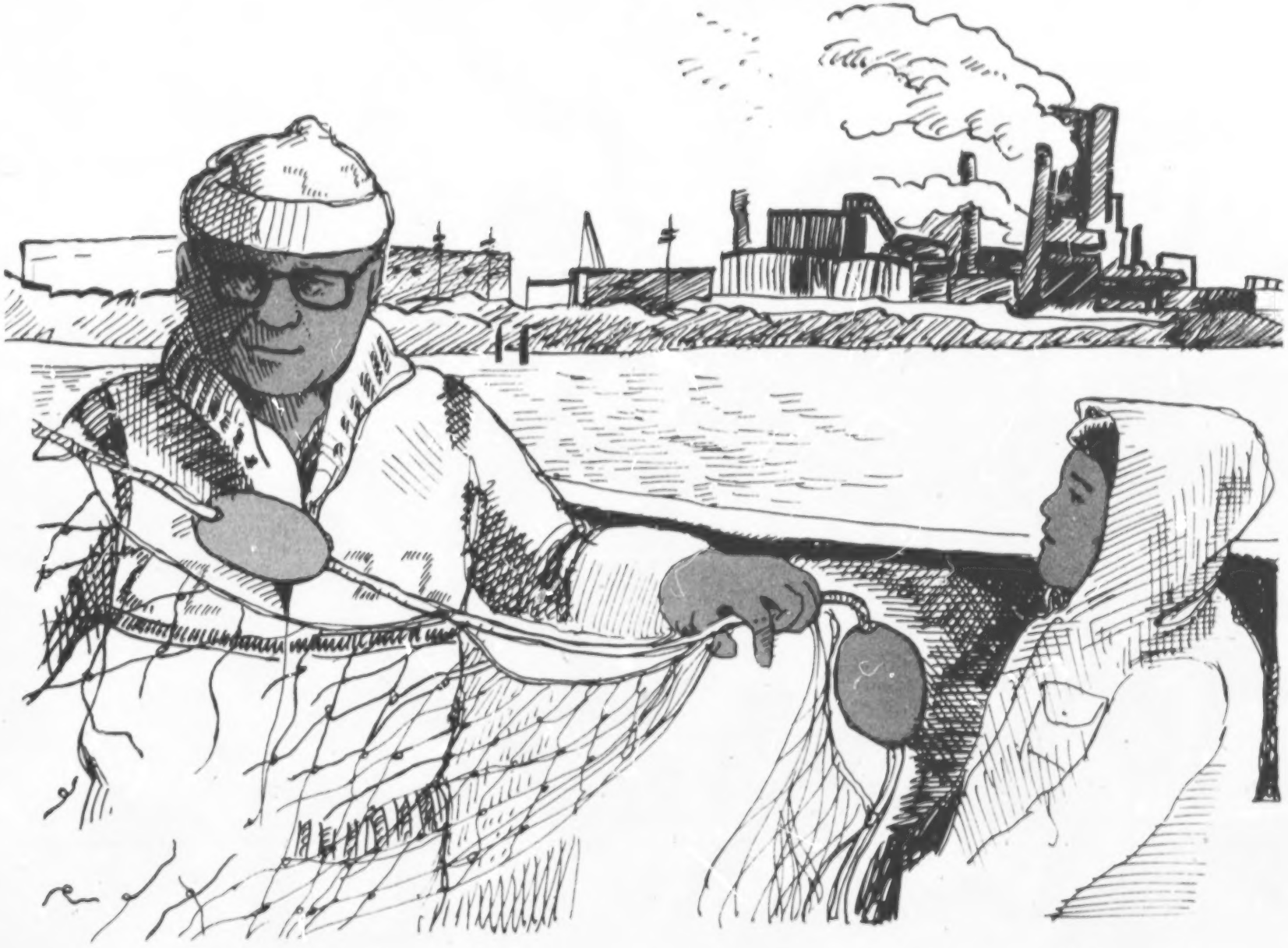
Grandfather turned the motor off. "Now, we and the net drift down river," Grandfather said. "When the salmon swim up river, they will swim into the net.

"The orange floats keep the top part of the net afloat. There is lead on the bottom line so that it will sink."

From time to time, Grandfather paddled the boat to one end of the net and then the other. Grandfather pulled on the ends of the net to keep it curved just right.

"Here we have to straighten the net," Grandfather said. "There are some big logs underwater that it might catch on and rip.

"The more you fish, the more you know what the bottom of the river is like and what you have to go around. You know just how hard to pull your net to keep it curved across the river."



It seemed a very long time to Seeyap before they reached the end of the river. Grandfather began pulling in the net. Many things had caught in it. Grandfather took out sticks and rocks and seaweed. There was a jellyfish that had floated up from the bay.

Seeyap was surprised that they had not caught any fish. He thought that surely after all this time, they should have caught some.

Seeyap felt lonely. Big gray waves slapped against the boat, one after the other. The pulp mill and the warehouses on the banks of the river loomed empty around them. They had drifted all that way down river and Grandfather had kept the net just right and still they had not caught any fish.

Grandfather jerked on the net. "Oh, no, we ripped it," he said. "It must have caught on the sand bar. There's a sand bar below us. All kinds of junk collects there."

Grandfather held up the part of the net with the rip in it. He took a ball of string from beneath Seeyap's seat and tied a few knots in the net.

"I'll fix it better when we get back to the trailer. Then, I'll teach you how."

Grandfather patted Seeyap's knee. "Don't worry. We'll catch some fish. One of the jobs of being a fisherman is waiting for the fish. Salmon only head up river when they think it is time for them to go home.

"It is hard for the salmon in the Puyallup River because the industry kills the life in the river. The salmon need the life to make their way home."

Grandfather and Seeyap went down the river one more time, but again they did not catch any fish. Lightning flashed across the sky. Thunder boomed.

"We better head in for shore," Grandfather said. "It looks like we're in for a storm."

During the storm, Grandfather and Seeyap sat with the other fishermen under the bridge. There was still a fire going in front of one of the tents from morning. During the storm, the men talked and laughed together. Seeyap sat close to Grandfather.

The thunder began to sound further and further away. The lightning was not so bright any more. Then, it began to rain. Rain poured out of the sky, making many little circles on the river. From out on the river, there came a slap, and then another slap. Salmon were jumping.

"The salmon are jumping," Seeyap said.

"Yep, they sure are," Grandfather said.

This time when Seeyap and Grandfather went down the river, the orange floats on the net jerked up and down. The salmon were swimming into the net and pulling at it.

"The cold rains let the salmon know that winter is coming," Grandfather said. "They let the salmon know that it is time to go home. The rains give life to the water, dead from all the industry. Then, the salmon head up river."

When Grandfather and Seeyap reached the end of the river, their net was full of fish. Grandfather began pulling the net out of the water and taking out the fish. When he had finished, eleven silver salmon lay on the bottom of the boat.

"We'll keep our first fish separate," Grandfather said. "When all the people come for dinner tonight, we'll tell them, 'This is our first fish of the season. This is Seeyap's first fish.'

"Long ago, the Puyallup had a special ceremony for the first fish of the season. They thanked the salmon for coming, so that it would come back the next year."

Grandfather and Seeyap went down the river three more times, catching many fish. The rain had stopped now, but the fish were still heading up river. On the last time down, Grandfather and Seeyap caught only one fish.

"The tide is coming in now," Grandfather said. "The salmon can no longer feel the force of the river against them. They will not go up river until the tide goes out again."

"Now it's time to load the fish in the truck," Grandfather said. "We'll sell some at the fish market, but most of them we'll keep for ourselves to eat this winter."

Grandfather and Seeyap carried the fish to the truck. They had caught more than forty fish. When they had finished putting the fish in the truck, Grandfather and Seeyap stood for a moment looking at them.

"Before going home, I always think of the way the fish swims hard against the force of the river and the way it jumps full of life. I think of its life, and then I feel my own life and yours, too."

Grandfather put his arm around Seeyap.

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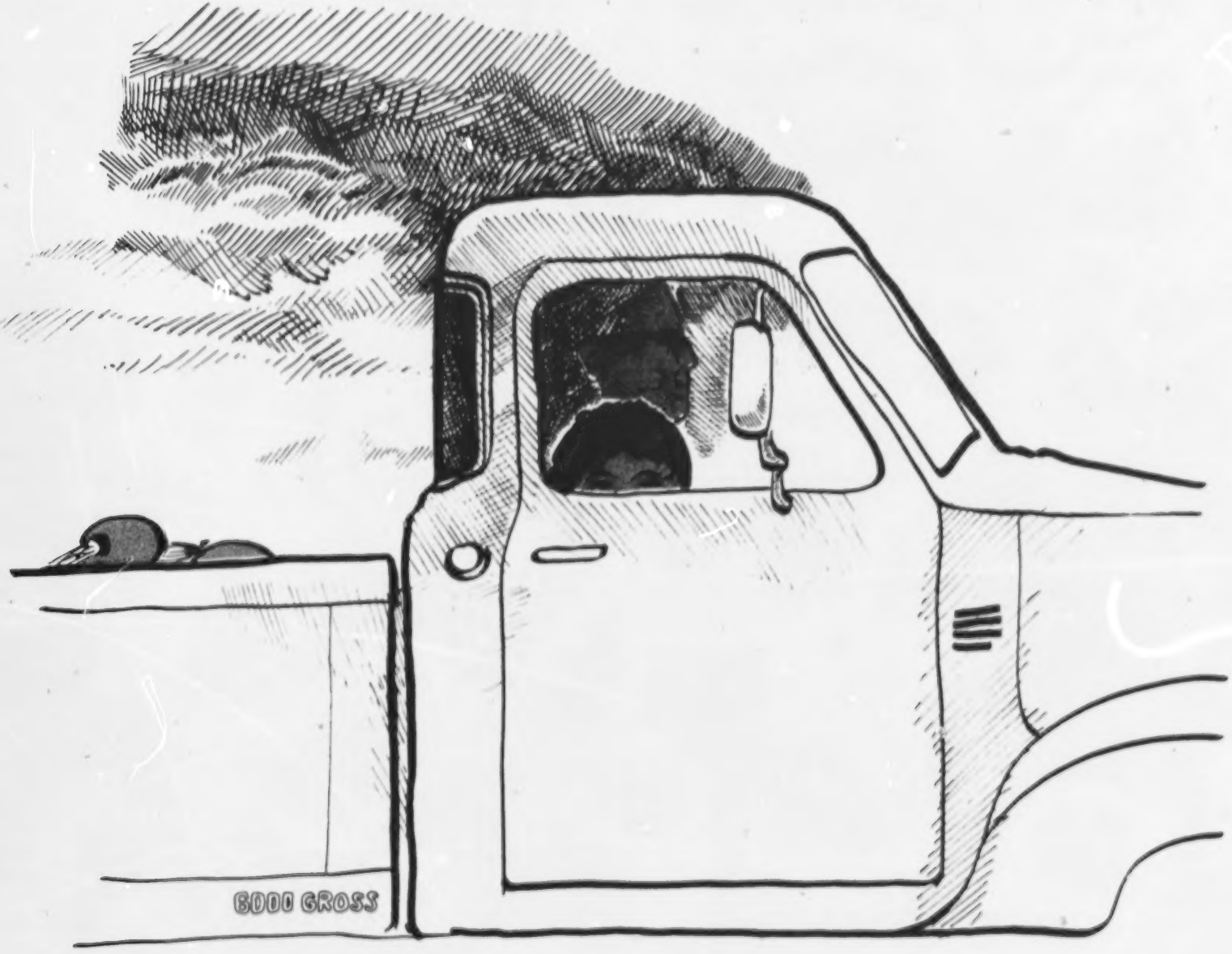
Seeyap and Grandfather drove through the streets of Tacoma to the fish market. Many people were just going to work. Seeyap had forgotten about everything when the fish had been jumping.

Grandfather turned on the radio. The warm heat from the radiator hit against Seeyap's legs. Seeyap felt tired. He leaned against his grandfather. He looked up at his grandfather driving the truck, at the old man's hands on the wheel.

Tonight, his mother and father and his older brother Mark would eat the salmon that he and Grandfather had caught. Tonight, when all the people came, he would tell them that he was going to be a fisherman when he grew up. A fisherman on the Puyallup.


GOOD GROSS